# Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens’ Initiative

2020/2275(INI) - 09/03/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 417 votes to 40, with 237 abstentions, a resolution on citizens' participation: on engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens’ Initiative.

***The right of petition***

Parliament stressed that the right of petition is the oldest instrument of direct citizen participation at EU level and that it is the most direct way for citizens to contact the EU institutions, to express their views on legislation and policy choices adopted at EU level and to lodge complaints about poor implementation. The number of petitions received in relation to the EU population remains modest and there are significant differences between Member States, regions and languages in the exercise of the right of petition. Members called for targeted information campaigns and civic education on EU citizenship rights.

Deploring the Commission's refusal to take action on individual petitions, Members called on the Commission to **review its strategic approach** to handling petitions, as it does not address, inter alia, issues relating to serious violations of EU law detrimental to the protection of citizens’ rights.

Stressing that the right to petition is an essential element of participatory democracy, Members urged Parliament and the Commission to adopt a **binding inter-institutional agreement** on the handling of petitions. They also called on the EU institutions to provide citizens with clear information on the right of petition and to systematically promote the use of this instrument.

Parliament called on the EU institutions and Parliament's committees, as well as Member States, to cooperate better with the Petitions Committee in order to respond effectively to petitioners and meet their demands. They also asked that the **Petitions Web Portal** be improved to make it more visible to the public, more user-friendly, easier and more intuitive and accessible to all citizens, including people with disabilities.

***The role of the European Ombudsman***

Recalling that the right to complain to the Ombudsman strengthens citizens' commitment to and trust in the EU institutions, Members called on the Ombudsman to look more closely at how EU funds and the budget are spent and whether the Union's interests are not undermined by breaches of the rule of law or disrespect for the Union's principles and values, corruption or conflicts of interest, especially in the context of the European recovery plan, Next Generation EU. They also believe that the Ombudsman should be given a bigger budget.

Parliament congratulated the Ombudsman on the work done to promote a policy of **multilingualism** and called on her to continue her efforts in this direction, as timely access to documents in all 24 official EU languages is essential to ensure proper participation of citizens and civil society in the decision-making process.

***The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI)***

The resolution emphasised that the initiative represents an exceptional opportunity for the citizens of the Union to identify and to put the issues or matters that they are concerned by onto the European political agenda, to articulate their aspirations and to call for the EU to act and legislate, and that its use must be encouraged and supported by all available means.

Recalling that only a handful of successful ECIs have been properly followed up by the Commission, Members called on the Commission to carry out a thorough assessment of the proposals made by each valid ECI and to comply fully with its **legal obligation** to set out in a clear, understandable and detailed manner its reasons for taking or not taking action.

The resolution called for Parliament's role to be further enhanced and for its links with civil society organisations to be enhanced with regard to specific valid ECIs and their implementation by the Commission.

Members believe that in the specific cases in which the Commission fails to publish its intentions within the given deadline or set outs in a communication that it intends not to take action on an ECI which has met the procedural requirements, Parliament could decide to follow up on the ECI with a legislative own-initiative report (INL). The Commission should commit to **submitting a legislative proposal** following Parliament's adoption of any such INL.

***Conclusions***

The resolution made the following conclusions regarding the three participatory instruments:

- the establishment and promotion of a large-scale, one-stop, accessible interinstitutional EU citizens' website (and application, which should be easy to use) to provide information on all the rights and democratic instruments that enable the public to participate directly in and influence decision-making at EU level is called for;

- regular collection of information on topics of interest to citizens and on recurrent issues;

- raising public awareness of these instruments, especially among young people, so that they become effective and useful tools for democratic participation

- the importance of teaching primary and secondary school pupils and university students about the three participatory instruments of the Union so that they are informed about the Union's decision-making process;

- the need to address the shortcomings of the EU petitions system, taking into account the special needs of people with disabilities and the difficulties faced by under-represented vulnerable groups;

- measures to ensure full transparency in the process of dealing with complaints and citizens' initiatives, as well as granting citizens access to all documents of the European institutions.